



Democrats and Hispanic Americans: *Working Together to Secure America's Future*

September 30, 2004

A Special Congressional Report Prepared by staff of the:

Senate Democratic Policy Committee

Senate Democratic Steering and Coordination Committee

Office of House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi



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Democrats know that Hispanic values are America's values. That is why we are fighting for policy initiatives that not only benefit millions of Hispanic Americans today, but at the same time make America even stronger for future generations. Democrats strongly support an agenda that will give Hispanic families the opportunity to achieve the American Dream.

In contrast, beyond photo-ops and political rhetoric, Republicans have done little or nothing to advance Hispanic priorities. Democrats have a different vision for America's future — one that reflects American values and the voices of hard-working Hispanic families. The Bush Administration has failed to adequately fund education programs that aid Hispanic students; failed to advocate for fair and equitable immigration laws; failed to support small business initiatives that would assist Hispanic entrepreneurs; failed to provide real tax relief for Hispanic families; and failed to provide adequate health care for working Hispanics.

Throughout the 108th Congress, Democrats have worked with Republicans whenever possible, but also worked to defeat Republican proposals that would harm middle-class families, including Hispanic families. In fact, last year, we unveiled the "Compromiso Demócrata con el Pueblo Latino." This report highlights Democratic efforts to secure America's future and provide greater opportunities for Hispanic families:

- ✓ Support Hispanic economic empowerment and provide economic security;
- ✓ Provide real resources to support real reforms and educational opportunities;
- ✓ Ensure access to health care for Hispanics;
- ✓ Make new progress on civil rights;
- ✓ Promote family unity, fundamental fairness, and economic opportunities for immigrants;
- ✓ Reestablish our historic commitment to Latin America;
- ✓ Strengthen national security;
- ✓ Support our nation's veterans; and
- ✓ Protect the environment and public health.

Since President Bush took office, the quality of life has deteriorated in the Hispanic community. The jobless rate among Hispanics has increased one-fifth to 6.9 percent, which means 1.4 million Hispanics are out of work. Currently, 7.7 million Hispanics live in poverty — 22 percent of the Hispanic population. The real median income of Hispanics has dropped by \$2,432. Over four million Hispanic children are excluded from the child tax credit because their parents' incomes are below the income threshold for the credit. The Hispanic homeownership rate is only 29 percent — 21.8 percent below the national average. And nearly 33 percent of Hispanics have no health insurance, which is almost double the national average.

As we enter the final days of the 108th Congress, Democrats remain steadfast in our support for policies that will advance the security and prosperity of all Hispanics across the country. We look forward to strengthening our partnership with the Hispanic community. Only by working hand in hand can we ensure a stronger America in the future.

Today, we pledge to:

Work to bring economic opportunity and prosperity to millions of Hispanic Americans. Last month, the Hispanic unemployment rate rose to 6.9 percent, with over one million Hispanics actively looking for work. Instead of providing tax cuts for the wealthy, Democrats are fighting to create good-paying jobs by investing in small business, manufacturing, infrastructure and technology, while removing incentives that encourage the outsourcing of U.S. jobs. Democrats support investments in job training to equip workers with the skills they need to succeed, along with extending unemployment benefits for people looking for work. In contrast, Republicans are fighting to squander an additional \$1 trillion over the next ten years on more tax cuts for the wealthy, while cutting funding for assistance to small business.

Fulfill the promise of a better education and college opportunity. Democrats are fighting to fulfill the promise of the *No Child Left Behind Act* to bring a better education to all children. That means providing the promised funding for public education, instead of denying over one million children who were promised after-school services, denying 57,000 limited English proficient children promised bilingual education, and eliminating funding for the dropout prevention program, as the Bush Administration has proposed. Democrats also are fighting against Republican efforts to dismantle Head Start for 271,000 Hispanic American children, including thousands of children of migrant workers. Democrats are fighting to expand access to college by making tuition tax deductible up to \$12,000 per year for middle-class families, and provide adequate resources for Hispanic Serving Institutions. Unfortunately, Republicans have voted against increasing college aid in the face of skyrocketing tuition costs. Democrats also support swift passage of the *DREAM Act*, which would ensure that immigrant children have the opportunity to achieve a college education.

Make health care more affordable. The availability of quality health care is a measure of the fairness of a society, and yet nearly one in three Hispanic Americans lack health insurance and millions more can barely afford to pay their premiums. The Bush budget does nothing to hold down costs. Democrats are fighting to reduce the costs of health care through tax credits for small business and an expansion of Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program, while also working to eliminate racially and ethnically based health disparities. In contrast, the Bush budget would encourage states to limit their Medicaid costs by cutting people from the rolls, and cutting benefits — an action that would harm the six million Hispanic Americans who receive health care through Medicaid. Democrats have proposed a minority health bill that would address the fundamental health disparities that the Hispanic community faces.

Strengthen our partnership with Latin America. Democrats believe that economic development and democracy in Latin America is vital to the national security of the United States. Democrats are committed to strengthening our nation's partnership with Latin America, and will continue to support robust U.S. leadership for economic development, democracy, and security throughout the hemisphere. In contrast, the Bush Administration has ignored this important region.

Promote family unity, fairness, and economic opportunities for immigrants. As part of our partnership with the Hispanic community, we continue to reform immigration policies that promote fairness and family unity, and improve our homeland security. Democrats are fighting to reward immigrants who work hard, pay taxes, and learn English with a chance to earn legal residency over time, which in future years sets them on a path to citizenship. We also support providing long-time immigrant students greater opportunities to go to college and establishing a new legalization program for immigrant agricultural workers.

Strengthen national security and supporting our nation's veterans. Over one million Hispanic veterans and 100,000 Hispanic enlisted personnel in uniform are bravely serving and sacrificing for our country. Hispanics are the most decorated group in the U.S. armed forces, winning the most medals for outstanding military service. Democrats succeeded in removing the barriers to citizenship for immigrant soldiers, and are fighting to provide troops with the best equipment available, and make permanent increases in military pay. In addition, we are working to improving veterans' health care and end the Disabled Veterans' Tax and the Widow's Tax, while the White House has proposed to raise health care costs for one million veterans and opposed these important veterans' proposals.

Support Hispanic Economic Empowerment and Provide Economic Security

Hispanic families are disproportionately experiencing the brunt of our troubled economy. According to the Center for American Progress, the current economic “recovery” has produced fewer jobs in the third year of the recovery than in the first, which is one of the reasons this recovery has been the worst since World War II (“George Bush’s Upside Down Economy,” May 24, 2004). Recognizing that the Republicans’ poor economic record has adversely impacted the Hispanic community, Democrats support a plan to create jobs, reduce poverty, and improve the quality of life of Hispanic Americans.

Restoring prosperity and creating jobs. The Bush tax cuts have not created good-paying jobs here at home, and have left minority families behind. In fact, last year, an analysis of Bush tax cuts concluded that “the tax cuts received by black and Hispanic taxpayers would be 35 percent smaller than the tax cuts received by white taxpayers” (House Government Reform Committee, April 2003). Democrats supported a more immediate, affordable approach that would have given our economy the boost it needs to create more jobs now, without causing long-term damage. Democratic tax proposals would have encouraged job creation and economic growth, extended and expanded unemployment insurance, provided aid to help states avoid tax increases and spending cuts, and enacted tax relief for low- and middle-income families. So far, 2.7 million fewer jobs have been created than the Administration predicted since the tax cuts took effect.

Child tax credit. One of the flaws of the Republican tax bill was its treatment of low-income families. Over four million Hispanic children received no benefit from the bill. The bill accelerated the expansion of the child tax credit from \$600 to \$1,000. However, Republican leaders excluded families with incomes between \$10,500 and \$26,625. Families with nearly 12 million children are left out by this provision — millions of whom are Hispanic — including more than 260,000 children with parents on active military duty. The Senate bill would have covered those families, but — following the lead of the President’s original proposal and the House bill — the final bill denied tax relief to these hard-working families. The Senate has passed legislation to fix this problem, but House Republicans are blocking those provisions in an effort to win further tax cuts for wealthier families.

Unemployment Insurance (UI) system. With over one million Hispanic Americans looking for work, Democrats are seeking to renew the federal unemployment extended benefits program which Republicans let expire at the end of March 2004. Democrats will continue to advocate for additional UI benefits for the more than one million people who have exhausted their unemployment benefits but still cannot find work. We also have proposed reforming and expanding the existing UI program to cover lower-wage and part-time workers, many of whom are Hispanic Americans. While part-time and low-wage workers pay into the system, they are often unable to receive benefits while searching for a new job.

Creating manufacturing jobs. Democrats are fighting to create manufacturing jobs for the hundreds of thousands of Hispanic Americans who have lost manufacturing jobs, but Republicans support tax breaks for corporate interests that ship jobs overseas. Overall, 2.7 million manufacturing jobs have been lost in the past three years. Yet the President’s latest budget cuts the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP), which helps small U.S. manufacturers with everything from plant modernization to employee training, by nearly two-thirds from Fiscal Year 2003 — meaning 28,000 workers would either be laid off or not hired. Democrats are working to improve funding for the MEP, while giving tax relief to U.S. manufacturers, including small businesses, to create good jobs here at home.

Increasing the minimum wage. According to the Economic Policy Institute, approximately 1.4 million Hispanic Americans would directly benefit from a minimum wage increase to \$7.00 by April 2006. In 1996, Congress voted to increase the minimum wage. Since then, the cost of living has increased 12 percent and the real value of the minimum wage has steadily declined. Minimum wage employees working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, earn \$10,700 a year, more than \$4,000 below the poverty line for a family of three. The current minimum wage fails to provide enough income to allow minimum wage workers to afford adequate housing in any part of the country. Democrats support legislation (S. 2370, H.R. 4256) sponsored by Senator Edward Kennedy and Representative George Miller, to increase the minimum wage to \$7.00 per hour. This legislation would improve the quality of life for over a million Hispanic workers by adding \$3,000 to their annual income.

Social Security. With over two million Hispanic Americans receiving Social Security benefits, Hispanics have an important stake in protecting and strengthening Social Security. Without Social Security, the poverty rate for Hispanic seniors would skyrocket from 16 percent to 55 percent according to the Social Security Administration. Survivors’ and disability benefits also are important to Hispanic Americans. Democrats are deeply concerned that the Bush Administration’s tax breaks would borrow

and spend all of the money from the Social Security Trust Fund over the next ten years, just as the Baby Boomers are about to retire. This situation would burden the next generation with \$2.7 trillion in debt over ten years.

Access to the financial services industry. Access to capital and financial markets is important to economic advancement. Hispanic majority-owned institutions have struggled to gain access to capital and public and private pension funds. Minority procurement programs at major corporations have typically not included financial services. Furthermore, many public pension funds have not established emerging financial services provider programs. Democrats are committed to ensuring that all businesses have access to the financial services industry.

Small business assistance. The growth of small business is critical to the prosperity of Hispanics in the United States. According to estimates by Hispanic Business, Inc., over two million Hispanic businesses exist in the U.S., a number which is expected to increase to over three million by 2010. These companies are expected to generate revenue of more than \$465 billion in 2010. Minority-owned firms have been growing at four times the rate of all firms in the United States. Many Hispanic American entrepreneurs rely on the Small Business Administration (SBA) for access to capital, technical assistance, and other resources critical to the growth of their businesses. Despite the importance of small business assistance to the Hispanic American community, President Bush has proposed to cut SBA resources by one-quarter. The President's Fiscal Year 2005 budget would cut \$79 million from the SBA, and reduce funds for more than 30 small business programs throughout the federal government, on average, by more than 66 percent (House Small Business Committee Democratic staff, March 4, 2004).

Microloan program. This program provides loans to low-income entrepreneurs, minorities, and women — those with the least access to capital and opportunities. Microloans create jobs, financial independence, and security, and contribute to economic development in low-income communities. In 2002, 15 percent of SBA loans were awarded to Hispanics, which resulted in \$26.5 million in loans and \$15 million in technical assistance. The President's latest budget proposal would eliminate this program, an action that would disproportionately harm Hispanic small business owners. Fortunately, House Democrats restored funding.

7(a) Loan Guarantee Program. In his Fiscal Year 2005 budget proposal, the President would eliminate all funding for the SBA's flagship loan program which provides long-term capital to small businesses. Instead, President Bush would fund the program through borrower and lender fee increases, cutting out the neediest borrowers. For the smallest borrowers, the fee would double. These program changes would severely impair the program's ability to serve the full range of small businesses that it serves today. This month, House Democrats offered an amendment to restore the \$79.1 million the President's budget cut from the SBA's 7(a) loan program. Despite strong Republican opposition, the amendment passed by a vote of 281 to 137.

New Markets Venture Capital program; the BusinessLINC program; and the Program for Investment in Micro-entrepreneurs (PRIME). President Bush's Fiscal Year 2005 budget proposal would eliminate key programs which help meet the needs of minority and low-income businesses. The President would eliminate the New Markets Venture Capital Program, which brings equity investment to low-income, high-unemployment areas where the private sector will not invest. The President also would eliminate the BusinessLINC program, which fosters business-to-business relationships between large and small firms and has shown measurable success in creating new teaming arrangements, contracts, and jobs as a result of partnering small businesses in low-income areas with larger firms. Furthermore, the President would eliminate the Program for Investment in Micro-entrepreneurs (PRIME), which provides business counseling and training to low-income micro-entrepreneurs who have talent and a good idea, but lack sufficient training and experience to manage cash flow and inventory, navigate and comply with regulations, and grow their profits to build wealth and create jobs.

The 7(j) Technical Assistance Program. President Bush's budget also would eliminate funding for additional SBA programs that provide technical assistance to small business entrepreneurs. This move particularly distresses Hispanic businesses because they rely on local SBA centers for personalized assistance. The 7(j) Technical Assistance Program provides technical and management expertise and resources to develop minority-owned 8(a) small businesses. The lack of technical assistance in accounting, grant writing, and bidding on federal contracts is one of the primary reasons many 8(a) businesses are unable to compete with larger firms. Despite this situation, President Bush's Fiscal Year 2005 budget proposal would cut the 7(j) Technical Assistance Program by 25 percent.

Access to federal contracts. President Bush has failed to address one of the biggest concerns of small businesses: access to federal contracts. The federal government has a responsibility to ensure that small businesses receive their fair share of federal contracts.

Yet, because of the increased bundling of federal contracts, fewer small businesses have the capacity to make bids on these larger contracts. In 2002, federal contracts to small businesses fell almost \$900 million short of the 23 percent small business utilization goal.

Procurement Center Representatives (PCRs). PCRs are responsible for isolating contracts and sections of larger (proposed and existing) federal contracts that can be performed by small firms in order to counter the negative affects of federal contract bundling and consolidation of small businesses. Small businesses continue to miss out on millions of dollars in federal contracts. Underserved communities are often hit hardest by these shortfalls, losing approximately \$17 billion in federal dollars that would have been distributed among disadvantaged businesses, women-owned and disabled veteran-owned businesses, and businesses in historically-underutilized areas. Regrettably, the President's most recent budget offers no additional funds to restore the number of PCRs needed to maintain proper oversight over federal contracting on behalf of small businesses.

Job training. Hispanic American workers are an integral part of today's workforce. As this youthful population matures, these individuals will become an even larger share of the U.S. workforce. Democrats are working to ensure that Hispanic workers are equipped with the tools and training they need to succeed. The reauthorization of the *Workforce Investment Act* (WIA) offers an opportunity to build on the successes of the *Act*, and to make improvements to the workforce development and adult education system. As WIA is reauthorized, Democrats will seek to strengthen employment opportunities that lead to self-sufficiency, retention, earnings increases, and improved skills for Hispanic Americans — initiatives that will strengthen our nation's workforce and improve productivity. Democrats are working to ensure that WIA eliminates training disincentives for hard-to-serve workers, including migrant and seasonal farmworkers; provides the necessary skills training and English language instruction for the limited English proficient population; and continues to target low-income, in-school and out-of-school youth.

Democrats also have opposed President Bush's budget proposals to cut job training and employment programs. Under his latest budget, by Fiscal Year 2009, funding for job training and employment would be cut five percent below this year's level, adjusted for inflation. This amount is on top of the more than \$1.5 billion in proposed cuts to job training and vocational education programs pursued since President Bush took office. For the second year in a row, the Bush budget proposes to eliminate funding for the National Farmworker Job Program, which provides training, housing, and medical care for agricultural workers. Over 70 percent of the estimated 1.6 million farmworkers in the United States are Hispanic, many of whom live in appalling conditions, and one-half of farmworker families earn less than \$10,000 per year (National Council of La Raza, *State of Hispanic America*, February 2004).

Homeownership. Democrats also are fighting to increase the homeownership rate in the Hispanic community. Since President Bush took office, the Hispanic homeownership gap has widened. Currently, the Hispanic homeownership rate is 29 percent — 21.8 points below the national average. Also, the percentage of Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loans made to minority homebuyers has fallen, and the mortgage denial rate for minorities compared to that for non-minorities has increased. Legislation introduced by Senate Democrats (S. 875, the *Community Development Homeownership Tax Credit Act*), would allow hundreds of thousands more families to achieve the dream of owning a home by providing tax credits for homeowners.

Fair Housing. According to National Fair Housing Alliance estimates, there were 1.8 million cases of racial discrimination in housing (both rental and home ownership) in 2003. Yet, halfway through the current fiscal year, the Fair Housing Office at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) had only issued discrimination charges in four cases and the Department of Justice (DOJ) had filed only seven cases. In the last fiscal year, HUD issued only four cases and DOJ filed only six cases. Democrats strongly support effective fair housing enforcement.

Remittances. As it becomes increasingly clear that cash remittances from the United States are the backbone of economic growth throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, hard-working Hispanic families across America continue to pay an unfair hidden cost on the assistance they send to their relatives throughout the hemisphere. Recent studies indicate that the average cost to send \$200 is nearly \$19 — or nine percent.

By ensuring that consumers have access to all price data on remittance services, forcing wire services to publish and update daily exchanges rates on a daily basis, and by encouraging banks and credit unions to serve the remittances market, Democrats will

ensure that hard-working Hispanic families keep more of their earnings and that unfair and hidden fees do not continue to accrue to wire transfer services.

This year, Democrats worked with Federal bank regulators to allow banks that offer low-cost remittances services to low- and moderate-income individuals to qualify for valuable *Community Reinvestment Act* (CRA) credit. CRA requires banks to serve the needs of the communities in which they do business.

Access to Mortgage and Small Business Credit. The CRA has been important in reducing discrimination in lending to residents and businesses in underserved urban and rural areas, and has been important to the extension of credit and the increase in homeownership rates in low- and moderate-income communities. And yet, Administration-appointed banking regulators have proposed to weaken the requirements of the CRA. The proposed regulations would make it much more difficult for rural families, and families in smaller urban areas, to obtain credit to buy a home or start a business. Efforts to encourage banks to provide low-cost remittances would be undermined. Financial literacy and homebuyer education programs would be cut back. Democrats strongly support the CRA and are fighting these harmful proposals.

Predatory mortgage lending. Rising predatory mortgage lending is a frontal attack on minority homeownership and wealth accumulation. Predatory mortgage lenders — lenders who strip equity from homes by packing inordinately high and unnecessary fees into loans that are not justified by a borrowers' risk — often target Hispanics, African Americans, immigrants, and the elderly. The Center for Responsible Lending indicates that predatory mortgage lending costs consumers more than \$9 billion annually. Democrats are working to strengthen protections against predatory lending. House Democrats, for example, have introduced legislation (H.R. 3974, the *Prohibit Predatory Lending Act*) to increase predatory lending protections by prohibiting balloon payments for high-cost mortgage loans, banning creditors from charging multiple late fees on the same payment, and prohibiting lenders from unilaterally requiring faster payment of the loan.

Public housing. President Bush's budget proposal once again slashes funding for public housing, eliminates the HOPE VI public housing revitalization program (after terminating the Drug Elimination Grant program two years ago), and significantly underfunds the Section 8 housing voucher program. Democrats are fighting to restore the Administration's severe budget cuts to housing programs and have urged the Administration to withdraw a harmful new policy, which underfunds many housing agencies around the country, resulting in voucher recipients losing their housing. In order to help provide affordable housing to the many low-income, Hispanic families in need, Democrats are working to fund a program to build additional affordable housing. Thousands of organizations around the country support the establishment of a National Affordable Housing Trust Fund, as introduced by Senator John Kerry and Representative Bernie Sanders, which would help preserve and rehabilitate existing housing that is affordable for low-income individuals.

Section 8 housing voucher program. The Section 8 housing voucher program, created over two decades ago, helps almost two million low-income families and over five million individuals, including working families, people with disabilities, and seniors, to rent private housing. However, thousands of Americans could lose their housing under the Bush Administration's plan to cut housing voucher payments. The Bush Administration has attacked this program in two ways: 1) proposing drastic cuts in the program's budget (in Fiscal Year 2005 alone, the Administration has proposed to underfund the program by \$1.6 billion, threatening the homes of 250,000 families); and 2) acting to cut this program by executive branch action without Congressional approval. These initiatives would undermine local Public Housing Agencies' abilities to provide vouchers to all current recipients and make it nearly impossible to provide vouchers to additional families in need.

Welfare. The 1996 welfare reform statute, the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act* (PRWORA), established the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant to states as a replacement for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which had provided cash assistance to poor families with children since 1935. The new program provided additional flexibility to states to administer their programs while requiring that able-bodied beneficiaries engage in work and work-related activities as a condition of receiving benefits. Democrats are encouraged to see that some families have succeeded in making the transition from welfare to work, but know it will be critical to maintain strong federal and state support for work supports if low-income families are to successfully make the transition from welfare to self-sufficiency. Unfortunately, rather than building on efforts to make welfare reform work, Republicans have chosen a partisan path and undercut welfare reform.

The House passed a five-year TANF reauthorization bill (H.R. 4) in February 2003, on a narrow partisan vote. The House bill undermines the 1996 welfare reform effort by making it much harder for states to provide job training, education, and child care for those leaving welfare. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that the bill will cost states \$6.1 billion over the 2005-2008 period, and may force states to cut services for low-income families to pay for these new, unfunded welfare requirements. House Democrats fought to improve the bill by expanding access to funding for job training and education; increasing child care funding by \$11 billion over five years; rewarding states that reduce child poverty; and passing through more child-support payments to low-income families.

In September 2003, the Senate Finance Committee approved its version of H.R. 4, the *Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone (PRIDE) Act*, with only some Republican members supporting the bill. On March 29, the Senate began debate on the PRIDE Act. After a strong bipartisan amendment that increased child care funding over five years by \$6 billion was adopted, however, Republican Leadership pulled the legislation from the Senate floor. By doing so, Republicans refused to allow consideration of additional amendments that would have restored health access to legal immigrant pregnant women and children and increased the minimum wage.

Democrats will continue to fight for low-income working families, many of whom are minorities, by supporting a bill that provides:

- ✓ Adequate child care funding;
- ✓ Reasonable work hours with separate requirements for mothers with children under age six;
- ✓ Partial credit for work;
- ✓ Child support flexibility;
- ✓ Transitional Medicaid Assistance (TMA) for families moving from welfare to work;
- ✓ Improvements in the TANF contingency fund to ensure that states receive additional funding when they face rising caseloads during economic downturns; and
- ✓ An employment credit to encourage states to help families successfully make the transition from welfare to work.

Child care. For the third consecutive year, the Bush Administration's Fiscal Year 2005 budget would freeze child care funding for five years, and eliminate child care services for more than 300,000 children by Fiscal Year 2009. Approximately 30,000 low-income children would lose child care assistance in the first year. These cuts come at the same time the Administration is proposing to increase work requirements for welfare recipients, including doubling the number of hours mothers with children under the age of six must work. The CBO has estimated that states would need at least an additional \$1.4 billion over the 2005–2008 period to provide child care for families meeting the President's work requirement. Currently, only one in seven eligible children receives child care assistance.

Democrats believe federal support for child care must be increased not only to cover any increase in work requirements for families receiving TANF, but also to continue to provide child care for low-income working families. Quality child care is essential for parents to succeed in the workplace and for children to have safe, healthy places to go while their parents are at work.

Provide Real Resources to Support Real Reforms and Educational Opportunities

Head Start. Head Start — the comprehensive preschool program for low-income children — serves approximately 30 percent of Hispanic children each year. Research continues to show that children who participate in high-quality early learning programs like Head Start experience long-lasting benefits including higher levels of academic achievement, reduced need for special education, and lower dropout rates. President Bush has proposed a plan to block grant the Head Start program, undermining the high-quality comprehensive services it provides and its success in helping children in poverty prepare to enter school ready to learn. Even though Head Start currently leaves behind 40 percent of eligible preschoolers, the President's budget essentially freezes funding for this crucial program, and actually cuts Head Start funding by \$177 million in 2006. By 2009, the cut in Head Start could result in 62,000 fewer children served than in Fiscal Year 2004.

Democrats are committed to strengthening Head Start, expanding its services to additional children, including English language learners, and fighting any proposals to block grant Head Start and dismantle the program. In July 2003, Senate Democrats introduced a blueprint for strengthening Head Start. The *Head Start Coordination and School Readiness Act of 2003* (S. 1483), builds upon the quality and high performance standards at the heart of the Head Start program. Also in July 2003, House Democrats offered an alternative to the House Republican Head Start bill (H.R. 2210) to strengthen school readiness, improve program quality, and eliminate the Republican provisions that would dismantle the high-quality federal standards and comprehensive services in Head Start. Unfortunately, nearly all House Republicans opposed that proposal.

Migrant and Seasonal Head Start. Established in 1969, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start is a comprehensive child development program that operates on the principle that the first five years of a child's life are the most crucial in the learning process. Designed to serve low-income families who are working in agriculture, the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program provides a preschool program to meet the emotional, health, nutritional, and psychological needs of the child and family. Currently, it only serves 19 percent of the 161,000 eligible children of migrant and seasonal farm workers. Recognizing that family transiency can be a challenge in providing consistent services to these children, Democrats are committed to enhancing this program and increasing funding to allow more children to participate. Toward this end, House Democrats supported a motion offered by Representative Raul Grijalva to increase funding for the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program in July 2003.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In January 2002, President Bush signed the NCLB legislation with the promise of improving K-12 education. Unfortunately, President Bush's budget requests have failed to live up to that commitment. In fact, the President's budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2005 would underfund the levels promised by NCLB for Fiscal Year 2005 by \$9.4 billion, leaving 4.6 million disadvantaged students behind. In addition, the President's budget request eliminates 38 education programs that provide vital services to Hispanic American children that target dropout prevention, gifted and talented, school counseling, alcohol abuse reduction, arts in education, and Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnerships (LEAP). Democrats recognize that low-performing schools disproportionately serve minority students. We support efforts to bring about needed reforms targeted at these schools, but also know that reform requires additional resources. Hispanic American students, in particular, would benefit from fully funding NCLB, including the Title I program that helps schools meet the needs of economically and educationally disadvantaged students.

Senate Democrats fought to increase funding for NCLB by offering an amendment to the Republican Budget Resolution that would have added \$8.6 billion to fully fund NCLB. Unfortunately, Republicans defeated this amendment on March 10, 2004 by a vote of 46 to 52.

House Democrats also have continually fought to provide needed funds to public schools. This year's House Democratic budget would have invested nearly \$9.8 billion more in improving K-12 public education over the next five years. More recently, House Democrats offered a proposal (H. Res. 685) to improve education by adding \$5.7 billion, creating a path toward full funding of NCLB. The proposal would have supported reading and math instruction for 500,000 additional low-income children; invested \$300 million to help working families obtain high-quality child care and after-school learning opportunities for their children; and increased assistance to local communities for children with disabilities.

Democrats also are leading the charge to ensure equity in school funding. This year, the Congressional Black Caucus, Congressional Hispanic Caucus, along with House and Senate Democrats introduced the *Student Bill of Rights* (H.R. 236) as a top educational priority. If enacted, the bill would require states to guarantee equal educational services across school districts and ensure that all students, regardless of race and economic status, are prepared to succeed academically and in life.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or special education. In 1975, the nation took a bold step to improve education for children with disabilities, a group whose needs had been woefully neglected, passing the landmark federal law that eventually came to be known as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA). This legislation established the right of children with disabilities to attend public schools, receive free services designed to meet their unique needs, and learn in regular education classrooms with non-disabled children to the greatest extent possible and authorized federal funds to cover some of the costs of these special services — ultimately promising states that the federal government would pay 40 percent of the costs. Since IDEA's passage, children with disabilities have moved in massive numbers from institutions, home education, or no education into their neighborhood public schools. However, Republicans have shortchanged special education for 6.9 million children.

Specifically, the Bush budget for Fiscal Year 2005 provides local school systems with less than half of the funding they are owed by the federal government.

The law is up for reauthorization. The House passed a partisan reauthorization bill, H.R. 1350, on April 30, 2003. The Senate version of the IDEA, S. 1248, which passed on May 13, 2004, makes several improvements over the House version. Statistics show that minority children, including limited English proficient children, often are improperly identified as needing special education, when in fact they need targeted help in an academic area or with their behavior or language skills. S. 1248 allows schools to use a portion of their IDEA funds to support these children before they need special education. Republicans rejected efforts to guarantee full funding of IDEA. The Senate bill does include discretionary authorization to place IDEA on a path to full funding by 2011. But, as we have seen from NCLB discussions, Republicans feel little obligation to live up to funding levels promised in an authorization bill.

Migrant Education Program (MEP). Most migrant children live in poverty and more than one in six migrant students are behind grade level, with the rate increasing as the students reach upper grades. The MEP provides funding to states to meet the unique needs of the children of migrant and seasonal agricultural workers and to better coordinate services and resources available to serve migrant students. MEP builds the support structures for migrant students, enabling them to achieve high levels of success in school and beyond. Despite the critical importance of the MEP and the fact that NCLB requires strict accountability measures for all students, including migrant children, the President's Fiscal Year 2005 budget proposal would freeze funding, providing insufficient resources to identify migrant students and provide them with the extra support necessary for academic success. Democrats have supported and will continue to support increased MEP funding.

High School Equivalency Program-College Assistance Migrant Program (HEP-CAMP). Migrant students suffer dropout rates of between 50 and 60 percent. The High School Equivalency program (HEP) helps migrant students who have dropped out of high school earn a GED, while the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) assists migrant students in their first year of college with counseling and stipends. In 1998-1999, 73 percent of the HEP participants received a GED, and 88 percent of CAMP students completed their first year of college in good standing. Despite the success of these programs, the President's budget would freeze funding for HEP-CAMP programs at Fiscal Year 2004 levels, which served only a small fraction of the eligible population. Under that proposal, over 1,000 fewer students would be served by HEP as a result of the Fiscal Year 2004 cuts and a freeze in Fiscal Year 2005 at that level. Democrats are fighting to increase support for and funding of HEP-CAMP programs given their importance to creating a skilled workforce.

After-school programs. The President's latest budget freezes funding for after-school programs including 21st Century Community Learning Centers (after-school programs), and denies over one million children after-school services promised under NCLB. Because lack of after-school supervision puts young people at greater risk of substance abuse and poor academic performance, many educators and law enforcement officials support after-school programs as an important way to reduce juvenile crime. According to a recent study, after-school programs "are already boosting academic performance, especially for African Americans and Hispanics" (*New York Times*, Bob Herbert, February 13, 2003; FightCrime.org, February 3, 2003). Democrats are committed to providing adequate federal support for after-school programs and have offered amendments to fulfill NCLB's after-school promise. Unfortunately, Republicans have opposed these amendments.

Dropouts. Over 27 percent of Hispanic students drop out of high school. Despite this, the President's budget eliminates all funding for dropout prevention for the second year in a row. Democrats have consistently opposed these egregious cuts and fought to preserve funding for this important program.

Private school vouchers. Because NCLB does not apply accountability standards to private schools, this creates a two-tiered system that holds students in public and private schools to different standards. Teachers, parents, and the general public have long been opposed to private school tuition vouchers because they direct public funds and attention away from the critical task of improving schools for all students. In addition, there is little evidence to suggest that voucher programs improve academic achievement. Equally important, private school vouchers fail to adequately protect civil rights. Schools receiving vouchers do not have to accept and serve students with limited English proficiency, special education students, homeless students, or students with discipline problems. Most Democrats believe that scarce funds should be targeted to public schools, which cannot and should not close their doors to students who pose a challenge.

The President's Fiscal Year 2005 budget includes a "choice incentive fund" that would divert taxpayer funds to private schools through a \$50 million voucher program — one that makes no real difference in student achievement. While the President says he wants accountability for the use of these federal funds, the higher educational standards and testing requirements in NCLB do not apply to the private schools that students would attend under the President's voucher program. Vouchers simply are not the answer to public education reform and a bipartisan majority in the Senate agrees that we need to focus on other reform measures. During the debate on the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) reauthorization, the Senate rejected a Republican amendment to create a \$50 million private school voucher program by a vote of 41 to 58.

Democrats have been leaders in the fight to improve public schools and provide all children with a quality education. We oppose Republican alternatives that divert attention, energy, and resources from efforts to reduce class size, enhance teacher quality, and provide every student with books, computers, and safe and orderly schools. Democrats support public schools and public school choice, such as open enrollment charter schools within public school systems. These proposals harness the positive forces of the free market without leaving some students behind.

Language Acquisition Grants. Over five million children with limited English proficiency (LEP) attend American schools today, and their numbers are growing rapidly. Between 1989 and 2000, the number of LEP students more than doubled. LEP students are now present in every state and in almost half of our nation's school districts. Much of the growth in this student population has been in states and school districts that previously enrolled only a handful of these children. Between 1989–1990 and 1996–1997, the population of LEP students more than doubled in 18 states: Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee, and Washington.

However, one-quarter of public schools with limited English proficient enrollments do not provide English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Without access to appropriate educational resources and programs to meet the linguistic and academic needs of LEP students, many children will struggle to meet high academic standards. Federally supported language instruction programs for these students provide an opportunity for them to gain proficiency in English, achieve high academic standards, prepare for employment, and fully integrate into American society.

NCLB made significant changes to better serve LEP students, and ensure that students make progress in learning English and in academic achievement. Under the new Title III program of NCLB — the language instruction program for LEP students — funds will be distributed by formula to every state according to the number of LEP and immigrant students, providing support to develop language instruction and bilingual education programs in local school districts. Programs will be research-based and federal dollars will support a broader range of services and provide greater support for LEP students.

The President's Fiscal Year 2005 budget proposal essentially freezes funding for bilingual education for the third year in a row. Under the Bush budget, 57,000 fewer LEP children would receive extra English instruction than promised in the NCLB *Act*. Cognizant of the critical importance of Language Acquisition Grants to the rapidly growing population of children with limited English skills, Democrats are committed to strengthening and expanding language instruction programs.

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) and TRIO. Since its creation, the GEAR UP education initiative has prepared over one million disadvantaged students to seek higher education, many of whom are Hispanic. GEAR UP supports early college awareness for low-income youth starting in middle school. In addition, GEAR UP identifies students in high-poverty schools and helps them complete high school courses. This program is critical for Hispanic American students, who are more likely than other students to drop out of high school and less likely than others to attend and complete college. TRIO programs help low-income first-generation students prepare for, attend, and complete college. Both GEAR UP and TRIO programs work effectively to ensure that the greatest number of students complete high school and get the critical information needed to apply to and finance college, as well as to go on to earn a college degree. Democrats are committed to strengthening and expanding these critical programs.

Adult education. Adult education helps adults complete a secondary school education, to become literate, to learn English, and to obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency. In addition, adult education helps parents obtain the educational skills, including language skills, necessary to communicate with teachers and school administrators and become full partners in the educational development of their children. In turn, improved skills provide adults with a solid foundation

that enhances success in employment and further education and helps them to be partners in their children's education. Federal resources also strengthen state efforts, in part by requiring a 25 percent match of state funding support. Without federal funding, many states would have no adult education programs. Unfortunately, the President's Fiscal Year 2005 budget proposal underfunds adult education programs. Democrats are committed to enhancing these programs in order to help increase adult literacy and build skills necessary for success in today's workforce.

Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). Serving 1.8 million students (874,270 Hispanic students), HSIs are degree-granting institutions where 25 percent or more of full-time undergraduate students are U.S. citizens of Hispanic descent. In 2002, approximately 230 HSIs were located in 12 states and Puerto Rico. Since 1992, Congress has recognized campuses with high Hispanic enrollments as federally designated HSIs and targeted these colleges and universities for federal funding to increase Hispanic enrollment and degree attainment. In 2003, \$93 million was awarded to HSIs under the *Higher Education Act*.

Forty-nine of the institutions are located in Puerto Rico; California has 73; Texas, 38; New Mexico, 20; and Arizona, Florida, Illinois, and New York each have at least ten. Other institutions are located in Colorado, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Washington. The list grows by about a half-dozen colleges each year. Democrats support increased resources for HSIs given their importance to educating Hispanics. In contrast, the Bush budget proposes a paltry two percent increase for Hispanic Serving Institutions — not nearly enough to keep pace with education inflation and the smallest increase in HSI funding in six years. Further, House Democrats support H.R. 2238, the *Next Generation Hispanic Serving Institutions Act*, which establishes a competitive grant program for HSIs that offer post-baccalaureate degrees to expand graduate opportunities for Hispanics and to enhance the post-baccalaureate offerings at HSIs.

Pell grants. Only one in ten Hispanic Americans attend college and only 11 percent of Hispanic adults have their bachelor's degree. Pell grants are key to helping Hispanic young people attend college, with 40 percent of Hispanic students at four-year public colleges and universities depending on Pell grants to make college affordable (Congressional Research Service (CRS) estimates based on National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, Department of Education, 1999–2000). However, the value of the maximum Pell grant has not kept up with the cost of college; it now covers much less of students' costs. As a result, more students are having to incur debt in order to obtain an education. Concern about the increase in student loan debt is causing an increasing number of students, especially minorities, to opt out of enrolling in college, or to leave before earning their degree. During his campaign, then-Governor Bush promised to raise the first-year aid to \$5,000 per recipient of the Pell grant (*University Wire*, February 12, 2003). Unfortunately, President Bush broke his promise. The President's Fiscal Year 2005 budget proposal would freeze the Pell grant maximum award for the third straight year at \$4,050, enough to pay just 34 percent of the average annual cost of attending college — down from 42 percent in 2001.

Democrats are committed to creating greater access to college by expanding financial aid programs that help our young people attend and graduate from college. Senate Republicans rejected a Democratic amendment to increase the maximum Pell grant from \$4,050 to \$5,100. Republicans in the House rejected a Democratic Resolution (H. Res. 685) to increase the maximum Pell grant by \$450 to \$4,500.

Access to higher education for immigrant students. The *Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act*, S. 1545, which addresses the tragedy of young people who have grown up in the U.S. and have graduated from U.S. high schools but whose future is circumscribed by current immigration laws, was introduced in the Senate by a Senate Democrat and Republican on July 31, 2003. Under current law, these young people are unable to adjust their immigration status, continue their lives as Americans, and attend college. The *DREAM Act* provides such a mechanism for them to have the opportunity to succeed. The *DREAM Act* was voted out of committee last October, and supported by Democrats and Republicans. Despite this situation, the Senate Republican Leadership has failed to bring the *DREAM Act* to the Senate floor. Similar House legislation, the *Student Adjustment Act* (H.R. 1684), also enjoys broad bipartisan support, but still has not been considered in the House Judiciary Committee.

Ensure Access to Health Care for Hispanics

Hispanics are more likely than any other group in the United States to be uninsured and to have difficulty accessing needed health care services. Democrats are committed to expanding health insurance for Hispanics, making health care more affordable, and reducing other barriers to health care. We are fighting to expand eligibility for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and Medicaid, provide tax credits to help small businesses provide health coverage to their employees, eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities, and improve access to culturally and linguistically appropriate health care. Democrats believe all Americans should have access to quality health care.

Access to affordable health care. The number of uninsured Americans has increased by 5.2 million since 2000, and health insurance premiums have been increasing by double-digit rates for the past four years. This lack of access to health care is especially problematic for Hispanic Americans. Nearly 33 percent of Hispanic Americans are uninsured, which is more than double the national average. Democrats have introduced bills that would provide affordable health insurance to many uninsured Americans. These bills would expand public programs like Medicaid and SCHIP as well as make private health insurance more affordable, especially for employees of small businesses. Democrats also have sought to make prescription drugs more affordable by working to create a safe system for importing lower-priced drugs from Canada and 19 other major industrialized countries.

Immigrant Children's Health Improvement Act (ICHIA). Since 1996, states have been prohibited from providing health coverage through Medicaid and SCHIP to legal immigrants who have lived in the United States for less than five years. This prohibition unfairly singles out legal immigrants for restricted access to public health coverage programs for which they would otherwise be eligible. Democrats have introduced legislation and offered amendments that would give states the option of covering legal immigrant children and pregnant women in their Medicaid and SCHIP programs. Democrats succeeded in including this proposal in the Senate's Medicare bill last year, but it was opposed by Republican leaders and was dropped from the final version of the Medicare law.

Medicare and affordable prescription drugs. About three million Hispanic Americans receive their health care through Medicare, and many are struggling to pay for the soaring cost of prescription drugs. Last year, the Republican-controlled Congress enacted a Medicare prescription drug bill that benefits big drug companies and private health plans. This bill does little to lower drug prices and fails to provide seniors with meaningful, affordable coverage. Democrats are fighting to improve this inadequate legislation by enhancing the drug benefit and allowing Medicare to use its purchasing power to negotiate lower drug prices. Democrats also are fighting to make prescription drugs more affordable by working to create a safe system for importing prescription drugs from Canada and other major industrialized countries.

Medicaid. Because Hispanic Americans are less likely to have employer-sponsored health coverage, Medicaid is an important source of health coverage. More than six million Medicaid recipients are Hispanic American. Even though the number of uninsured Americans is growing, states have been forced to scale back Medicaid spending in recent years because of serious state financial problems. In 2003, Democrats responded to this crisis by successfully fighting for \$10 billion to help states with their Medicaid costs, an effort the Bush Administration originally opposed. Democrats also are fighting against the President's Medicaid plan which would eliminate the current guarantee that federal funds will automatically increase as the cost of providing health services for Medicaid recipients increases. The plan would give states new authority to cut benefits, cap enrollment, and increase the amount Medicaid recipients must pay for services.

Health disparities. The health status of Hispanic Americans, like other minorities, continues to lag behind white Americans. Hispanic Americans have disproportionately higher rates of many illnesses, such as diabetes and heart disease. Democrats are working to eliminate these health disparities by reducing the number of uninsured and underserved minorities, increasing the number of minority health professionals, expanding health screening and outreach programs in communities of color, improving racial and ethnic health data collection, and increasing funding for health programs for Native Americans and U.S. territories. Democrats also support improving access to health care for those with limited English proficiency, including providing medical interpretation services and the translation of written material. Last year, Senate and House Democrats worked with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Congressional Black Caucus, Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, and the Congressional Native American Caucus to introduce comprehensive legislation—the *Healthcare Equality and Accountability Act*—to reduce racial and ethnic health disparities.

Patients' citizenship status. Last year's Medicare law included federal funding to health care providers for furnishing emergency health services to undocumented immigrants. But the Bush Administration has recently released guidelines for implementing the provision that would require health care providers to request and record patients' citizenship status in order to receive those funds. Democrats strongly oppose the Administration's requirement, which could deter undocumented immigrants from seeking emergency care and would turn health care providers into enforcers of federal immigration laws.

Domestic HIV/AIDS programs. The rate of HIV/AIDS among Hispanic Americans continues to increase at an alarming rate. In its latest examination of the epidemic, the Centers for Disease Control reported that Hispanic Americans represent about 19 percent of new HIV/AIDS cases contracted in the U.S., while comprising only 13 percent of the population. Democrats have been working to secure additional funding for domestic HIV/AIDS programs and have been critical of the woefully inadequate Bush Administration requests. This year and last year, President Bush requested an inadequate increase for the AIDS Drug Assistance Program — millions below the amount needed to ensure that all eligible people with HIV have access to this important program. This year's budget request also froze all other components of the *Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resource Emergency (CARE) Act*, which assists with health care and other supportive services, and froze funding for HIV/AIDS prevention programs.

Make New Progress on Civil Rights

Democrats remain steadfast in our commitment to civil rights by working to strengthen the enforcement of existing civil rights laws, ensuring that every eligible citizen has the right to vote and that their votes are counted, expanding hate crimes protections, and responding to the injustices of racial profiling.

Judicial nominations. Democrats know that our federal courts have played a critical role in upholding and strengthening civil rights, environmental and consumer protections, as well as workers' privacy rights. Numerous Bush nominees have anti-civil rights, anti-environment, and anti-consumer protection records. Democrats have been vigorously working to identify those biases and concerns, and prevent these nominees from slipping through the system undetected. President Bush and Senate Republicans try to frame these efforts as obstructionism, but federal judges shape our basic daily rights and protections, and Democrats will continue to vigorously oppose nominees who will not protect our communities.

Election reform. Democrats strongly support election reform. Despite the gains made during the civil rights era, unfortunately, Hispanic Americans and other people of color are often denied the opportunity to vote. In its budget for Fiscal Year 2005, the Administration calls for only \$40 million in funding for election reform, even though the bipartisan *Help America Vote Act* (HAVA) authorizes \$800 million more to ensure that everyone's vote is accurately counted. Democrats support full funding for the HAVA and increased funding for the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice. We are fighting to ensure that its resources are being used effectively to prevent voter suppression and minority vote dilution.

Hate crimes. Hate crimes are a serious threat to all communities. Experts estimate that a bias-related crime is committed every 14 minutes. Democrats strongly support legislation to end hate crimes, and have succeeded in passing this legislation in both the House and the Senate only to see the Republican Leadership block final enactment.

Racial profiling. Across the country, too many motorists fear that they will be stopped by police officers for no reason other than the color of their skin. Whether profiling occurs while Americans are driving, walking, or shopping, Democrats believe we must require federal, state, and local law enforcement officers to take steps to prevent racial profiling. Representative Conyers and Senator Feingold have introduced the *End Racial Profiling Act of 2004*, which would prohibit any law enforcement agent or agency from engaging in racial profiling and also would authorize the United States or an individual injured by racial profiling to bring a civil action in state court or U.S. district court.

The Civil Rights Act of 2004 (the *Fairness and Individual Rights Necessary to Ensure a Stronger Society (FAIRNESS) Act of 2004, S. 2088/H.R. 3809*). Civil rights laws enacted over the last 40 years have strengthened our nation and brought us closer to the fundamental American principle of equal treatment for all, including Hispanic citizens and immigrants. However, recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions have weakened these basic protections. The FAIRNESS Act would correct several recent court rulings that set back basic civil rights. The FAIRNESS Act is designed to ensure that our nation keeps its promise of equal treatment by protecting the rights of workers, including low-wage undocumented workers; guaranteeing equal access to the courts; ensuring meaningful remedies for victims of discrimination; and preventing discrimination in government-funded programs.

Safeguarding civil liberties. The attacks of September 11th changed our nation forever. Since then, much has been done to combat the threat of terrorism and to make America safer. However, not every policy adopted has been effective, legal, or fair. Over the past three years, for example, the Administration has violated the rights of thousands of Hispanic immigrants. Democrats are committed to strengthening our national security, but not at the expense of basic civil liberties. Senate Democrats, led by Senator Edward Kennedy, introduced S. 2538, the *Civil Liberties Restoration Act* (CLRA), which would provide basic civil liberties protections and restore balance and fairness to our laws in the treatment of immigrants. House Democrats introduced similar legislation (H.R. 4591).

Promote Family Unity, Fundamental Fairness, and Economic Opportunities for Immigrants

Since the tragic events of September 11, immigrants have been under a tremendous amount of scrutiny. Democrats know that the richness and diversity of our country has been strengthened by innovative ideas and skills from new Americans. Democrats believe our immigration laws must reflect our core values of family unity, fundamental fairness, and economic opportunity, while protecting our national security and our civil liberties.

Comprehensive immigration reform. Democrats will continue fighting to extend Section 245(i), provide due process reforms, and ensure refugee protection. Democrats are fighting for comprehensive immigration reform that reunites the families of American citizens by reducing the years of family separation caused by a backlogged bureaucracy and unduly restrictive laws, and rewards work by giving immigrants who are in the U.S., work hard, pay taxes, and learn English a chance to earn legal residency over time and, in future years, sets them on a path to citizenship. Such a plan must respect and protect workers through the provision of basic worker protections for all immigrant workers, while reducing illegal immigration by devising fair and reasonable, safe and orderly rules that are realistic and enforceable. The *Safe, Orderly, Legal Visa and Enforcement (SOLVE) Act* (S. 2381, H.R. 4262), which was introduced by Senator Edward M. Kennedy and Representative Luis Gutierrez, takes a significant step to remedy our nation's broken immigration system.

The Agricultural Jobs, Opportunity, Benefits, and Security Act of 2003 (AgJOBS). Democrats also strongly support the AgJOBS bill, S. 1645, introduced by Senator Edward Kennedy to create a new legalization program for those who have been working in America's agricultural sector. Legalizing the agricultural work force will ensure that it is stabilized, which is in the U.S. national interest. The AgJOBS bill also would permit new immigrant agricultural workers to sponsor their spouses and children for dependent visas. Representative Howard Berman has introduced the House version of the *AgJOBS Act*, H.R. 3142.

Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS). Democrats are working to ensure that as the new BCIS subsumes the functions of the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS), the quality of services provided to immigrants and refugees is improved and the integrity of the naturalization process continues to be a top priority.

Immigration fees. Despite President Bush's emphasis on immigration as a meaningful opportunity for newcomers to learn about our country's values, his budget places unfair and nearly insurmountable obstacles in their path. The President's Fiscal Year 2005 budget incorporates proposed increases in fees for immigration-related applications. Under the proposals, the fees for starting the naturalization process will increase from \$310 to \$390, a 26 percent increase. The Administration also has proposed an increase in the fees charged to U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents petitioning to bring family or employees into the United States and to foreign nationals in the United States seeking immigration benefits. Applicants for U.S. citizenship already incur large expenses in the naturalization process — most of which are non-refundable — as they pay fees for application assistance and English and civics educational services. For example, a couple with two young children pursuing naturalization could pay as much as \$1,260 under the fee increases. All totaled, the Administration expects immigration fees to increase by \$150 million this year. Democrats believe immigration fees must remain reasonable and not prevent immigrants from moving forward with the naturalization process.

Reestablish Our Historic Commitment to Latin America

Democrats believe that promotion of economic development and democracy in Latin America is vital to the national security of the United States and should not be left on the back burner. Democrats are committed to reestablishing our nation's partnership with Latin America's people and leaders, and will continue to support robust U.S. leadership for economic development, democracy, and security throughout the hemisphere. Democrats have watched, with great disappointment, the Bush Administration ignore our friends in this important region — and walk away from the gains achieved in this area through years of effective American foreign policy. In President's Bush's Fiscal Year 2005 budget, Latin America is the only region in the world that will suffer foreign aid cuts. While planned U.S. aid for Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia will be either increased or maintained at current levels, economic aid to Latin America will drop from \$757 million in 2004 to \$721 million in 2005. Despite repeated Administration claims that Latin America is one of its foreign policy priorities, these cuts are still being made at a time when Latin American democracies are threatened and extreme poverty rapidly spreads.

Facilitating development in Latin America. While Democrats work to increase funding for foreign assistance initiatives such as the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), which will improve the economies and standards of living in qualified developing countries, we also will fight Republican efforts to pay for these new programs by gutting core accounts that have helped the poor throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Democrats supported the appropriation of roughly \$1 billion for the fund's initial year, and were pleased to see that three Latin American nations — Nicaragua, Honduras, and Bolivia — were selected to be eligible to apply for MCA funding in 2004. Democrats are committed to adequately funding the MCA in Fiscal Year 2005, but also are mindful of the challenges in other countries throughout the hemisphere and, therefore, will work to ensure that funding for MCA does not come at the expense of other initiatives.

President Bush's Fiscal Year 2005 budget proposal would cut Child Survival and Health programs, emergency refugee assistance, and development assistance funds. Democrats successfully fought to restore cuts to these programs requested by President Bush in Fiscal Year 2004, and are committed to restoring funding again this year, given the vital role of these programs in our country's efforts to assist Latin America.

Supporting economic stimulation in Mexico. Democrats know that our relationship with Mexico is critical, not just because Mexico is our closest neighbor to the South, but also because it is an important partner in trade, the wars against terrorism and drugs, and other multinational efforts. Unfortunately, Mexico's economy — the world's ninth largest — has been rocked by the falling prices of agricultural commodities and hindered by rural underdevelopment and poverty. In order to stimulate Mexico's economic infrastructure, during debate on S. 925, the *Fiscal Year 2004 Department of State Authorization Act*, Senator Harry Reid offered an amendment to authorize \$100 million for microcredit lending, small business entrepreneurial development, aid to small farmers who have been harmed by the collapse of prices, and support of Mexico's private property ownership system, which is in serious need of repair. The amendment passed with strong Democratic support, but unfortunately, Senate Republican Leadership has delayed passage of the bill to which the amendment is attached.

Protecting human rights in Colombia. For over three decades, a tragic civil war fueled by narcotics, terrorism, guerilla warfare, and human rights abuses has devastated the people of Colombia. Both to protect our national security and to promote a resolution to this conflict, the United States has provided billions of dollars in aid to Colombia to help the Colombian government combat narcotics trafficking and confront guerilla armies. As we work to bring peace to the Colombian people, Democrats have been consistent advocates for greater human rights protections for non-combatants. Each year, the President must certify to Congress that Colombia meets certain minimum human rights standards before U.S. aid is delivered, and Democrats have insisted that this policy tool be used to promote improved protections for non-combatants, an end to paramilitary violence, and other human rights improvements.

This summer, Senators Christopher Dodd and Russ Feingold, along with other Democratic senators, sent a letter to Colombian President Uribe, urging him to comply with the United Nations' recommendations on human rights, including breaking ties between the Colombian military and paramilitary groups. Also this summer, Senator Robert Byrd proposed an amendment to S. 2400, the *Fiscal Year 2005 National Defense Authorization Act*, that would have limited the U.S. military presence in Colombia to prevent our troops from being drawn into the front lines of guerilla warfare. Though 39 Democrats supported this amendment, it was defeated by a Republican majority. At the insistence of Democratic members of the House Armed Services

Committee, a similar limitation was inserted into H.R. 4200, the House version of the Defense Authorization bill for Fiscal Year 2005.

Strengthen National Security

Hispanic Americans constitute nearly ten percent of enlisted personnel in our nation's armed forces, with over 100,000 Hispanic enlisted personnel in uniform. Democrats are committed to ensuring that the men and women of the United States military have the resources, support, and equipment they need to successfully and safely defend our nation.

Strength overseas is critical to our security, but it is no substitute for strength at home. While Democrats work to build upon our military's global superiority, we also recognize the urgency of strengthening our defenses here at home. That is why Democrats have been the nation's strongest advocates for measures to address vulnerabilities in our homeland security.

Providing troops with the best equipment available. Unfortunately, the war in Iraq has exposed severe deficiencies in the equipment provided to our troops. Thousands of soldiers lacked proper protective body armor for nearly a year after the war began, and severe shortages also have been reported in night-vision goggles, rifles, armored Humvees, and other equipment and gear critical for protecting troops from insurgents' attacks. In an effort to address this problem, House Democrats successfully added millions of dollars to the *Fiscal Year 2004 Supplemental Appropriations* bill to provide more body armor and other essential equipment. In the Senate, on October 2, 2003, Democrats supported an amendment to the *Fiscal Year 2004 Supplemental Appropriations* bill, introduced by Senator Christopher Dodd, that would have provided an additional \$322 million for safety equipment, including body armor. Republicans united to defeat this amendment.

Increasing compensation for troops on the front lines. The thousands of military personnel serving in Iraq and Afghanistan receive two bonuses — the Family Separation Allowance (FSA) and Imminent Danger Pay (IDP) — to compensate them for their tremendous dedication and sacrifice. On April 2, 2003, Senate Democrats helped pass an amendment to the *Fiscal Year 2003 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations* bill that increased FSA from \$100 to \$250 per month and IDP from \$150 to \$225 monthly for eligible military personnel. House Democrats strongly supported the passage of this provision into law. Unfortunately, when the pay increase expired at the end of Fiscal Year 2003, the Bush Administration opposed its extension. However, Democrats demanded that these soldiers continue to be compensated for the dangerous conditions in which they do their difficult jobs and successfully pressured Republicans to agree to a provision in the *Fiscal Year 2004 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations* bill that extended the increases for one year to all those soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Providing Guard and Reserve members with access to quality health care. As many as 20 percent of all National Guard and Reserve members — including 40 percent of junior enlisted personnel, which is disproportionately made up of Hispanic Americans — have no access to health care. Health care is critical to ensuring that reservists are physically able to answer the call to duty whenever that call is sounded. Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle has led the fight in the Senate to provide reservists with access to TRICARE, the military's health care system. On June 2, 2005, the Senate passed an amendment offered by Senator Daschle, along with Senator Lindsey Graham, to provide all reservists with permanent access to TRICARE. House Democrats also have supported TRICARE access for reservists. The House Democratic budget continues military health care (TRICARE) for reservists, permitting them to buy in to TRICARE if they are unemployed or have no employer-provided health care.

Fighting for critical Homeland Security priorities. Democrats continue to fight for urgently needed homeland security measures, including assistance to our nation's first responders. In June 2003, a Council on Foreign Relations independent task force report, entitled *Emergency Responders: Drastically Underfunded, Dangerously Unprepared*, found a five-year budget shortfall of \$98 billion for first responders. Yet, President Bush's Fiscal Year 2005 budget would reduce funding for grants to local police, fire, and emergency medical agencies from \$4.2 billion in Fiscal Year 2004 to \$3.5 billion in Fiscal Year 2005 — more than a 15 percent decrease. As Kevin O'Connor of the International Association of Firefighters has stated, "this budget is profoundly disappointing to first responders...It's a continuation of the president's lack of commitment to first responders in general and firefighters in particular" (United Press International, February 2, 2004).

Ensuring that our nation's first responders receive the resources, training, and equipment they need to effectively respond to terrorist attacks and other emergencies, Senate Democrats have declared their intentions to restore funding in the Fiscal Year

2005 budget. During consideration of this year's *Budget Resolution*, Democratic Senators attempted to add funding for programs like Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) and *Firefighter Investment and Response Enhancement (FIRE) Act* grants, the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) program, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) state formula grants, and other programs.

House Democrats attempted to add \$3 billion to the *Fiscal Year 2005 Homeland Security Appropriations* bill to correct known homeland security deficiencies in first responder preparedness, port and transit security, aviation security, border security, and bioterrorism preparedness.

Support Our Nation's Veterans

Over one million Hispanic Americans — about five percent of the Hispanic population in the United States — have served with dedication and courage in our nation's armed forces. Democrats believe that our troops should be taken care of when we send them into battle and when we bring them home. Over the past several years, Democrats in Congress have fought to ensure that our nation's veterans have the support and resources they have earned with their dedicated service.

Ensuring an adequate Veterans Affairs (VA) health care budget. The President's budget raises health care costs for one million veterans, imposing new co-payments and enrollment fees that will cost veterans over \$2 billion during the next five years. Every year since taking office, the Bush Administration has proposed increasing out-of-pocket health care costs for veterans. Specifically, the President's budget proposes doubling the prescription drug co-payments and imposing a \$250 enrollment fee for veterans making as little as \$25,000 per year. Further, the President's budget shortchanges veterans' health care, requesting \$2.5 billion less than the amount needed to maintain current services according to the House Veterans' Committee. This decision is unconscionable at a time when thousands of veterans are waiting six months or longer for an appointment at VA hospitals, particularly given that the demand for veterans' health care will only increase as soldiers return from Iraq and Afghanistan. Hispanic veterans are more reliant on VA for health care than others — 12 percent report it as their only source of health care.

Democrats have fought to increase funding for veterans' health care and to block President Bush's proposals to increase out-of-pocket costs for veterans. Last year, Democrats defeated cuts in veterans' benefits in the House Republican budget, defeated the President's proposal to increase the cost of health care for veterans making as little as \$25,000 a year, and added more than \$1 billion to the veterans' health care budget. This year, Democrats have fought to add funding to yet another inadequate Bush Administration budget proposal. Republicans have turned back some early Democratic efforts to increase funding, but Democrats are committed to continuing this fight until veterans receive the support they deserve.

Fighting for full concurrent receipt. Democrats have fought to address the needs of military retirees by ending the Disabled Veterans Tax, which reduces retirement pension by one dollar for every dollar they receive in disability pay. Senator Harry Reid and Representative Jim Marshall have championed legislation to permit veterans full concurrent receipt of both their retirement pension and disability compensation. Last year, because of Democratic efforts and over the objections of House Republicans, Congress began to phase in full concurrent receipt for the one-third of disabled veterans with disability service connection ratings higher than 60 percent over ten years. House and Senate Democrats will continue to fight for full concurrent receipt for all disabled veterans.

Ending the Widow's Tax. The military's Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) was created to provide widows and widowers of deceased military personnel with some support to compensate for the loss of income from the pension their spouses had been scheduled to receive. Similar to life insurance, military personnel pay premiums into the SBP program, which then pays their survivors an annuity in the event of their death. Under current law, however, this annuity suffers a dramatic decrease when the survivor reaches age 62, despite the fact that many participants were never informed of this rule. Democrats have fought to eliminate this tax on widows and widowers of military personnel and, this year, both the House and Senate passed provisions in their versions of the *Fiscal Year 2005 National Defense Authorization Act* to eliminate this reduction. We are committed to continuing to fight until a solution to this problem is finally passed into law.

Enhancing veterans' education opportunities. On June 22, 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed into law the *Serviceman's Readjustment Act*, better known as the *G.I. Bill of Rights*. In the 60 years since the first G.I. Bill was signed, more than 21 million veterans and family members have received education and training from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The G.I. Bill

has enabled thousands of Hispanic veterans to be the first in their families to attend college. Democrats have strongly supported efforts to improve educational opportunities for all Americans, and believe that the federal government has a special obligation to repay the courageous service of veterans and military personnel.

Veterans have called for the creation of a new G.I. Bill for the 21st Century “that fully covers the educational costs of eligible service members to a college or university of their choice.” Senator Bob Graham has taken a significant step toward this goal, introducing S. 2534, the *Montgomery G.I. Bill for the 21st Century Act*. This legislation would extend and expand benefits under the Montgomery G.I. Bill (MGIB), and also would help veterans qualify for additional financial aid for education. In the House of Representatives, Representatives Dave Camp, Ciro Rodriguez, Congressional Hispanic Caucus Chair, and Bob Filner have each introduced legislation to improve MGIB benefits for veterans.

In the House, the Democratic support for Veterans and the Armed Forces includes provisions to increase the basic educational assistance for reservists under the Selected-Reserve Montgomery G.I. bill to restore the program’s purchasing power, which has eroded over the years. Reservists and their families are making an unprecedented sacrifice in the Iraq war. More than 325,000 Guardsmen and Reservists have been activated since September 11, 2001, and they comprise about 40 percent of our total force in Iraq. Democrats are committed to making sure that they have decent educational benefits when they return home.

Protect the Environment and Public Health

Democrats are committed to providing the American people with a cleaner environment, stronger public health measures, and protection of our natural treasures for future generations. Democrats continue to work to ensure that more people are breathing clean air and drinking clean water; toxic waste and industrial sites are cleaned up; and that minority and low-income populations do not suffer a disproportionate burden of pollution and associated public health threats. In order to combat the disparity in exposure to hazardous substances, members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and the Congressional Black Caucus have introduced the *Community Environmental Equity Act* (H.R. 4215), which would amend existing law by adding a specific prohibition against entities that expose communities on the grounds of race, color, or economic status to environmental hazards and pollutants.

Toxic waste cleanup. The Superfund toxic waste cleanup program, which is based on the polluter pays principle, has made it possible to cleanup hundreds of toxic waste dumps across the country. Despite the fact that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) national priority list includes 1,242 sites that require a cleanup and one in four Americans live within four miles of a Superfund site, the Bush Administration has weakened this program. In 2002, the Bush Administration announced it would not seek reauthorization of the Superfund fee that is used to pay for the cleanup of waste sites. In addition, the Bush Administration has insufficiently funded the program, delaying previously scheduled site clean-ups. These clean-up programs are important given the disproportionate share of toxic waste sites located in Hispanic American communities.

Specifically, Hispanic Americans are heavily concentrated in cities with the largest number of abandoned toxic waste sites, such as Memphis, St. Louis, Houston, Cleveland, Chicago, and Atlanta (Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, <http://cbcfhealth.org/content/contentID/1107>). Recognizing the danger of this situation, Democrats are fighting to adequately fund the Superfund toxic waste cleanup program and have introduced S.173, the *Toxic Cleanup Polluter Pays Renewal Act*.

Clean water. Progress has been made in cleaning up our nation’s lakes and rivers and eliminating pollution discharges, but 40 percent of our lakes, rivers, and streams remain too polluted for fishing and swimming. More than 300,000 miles of rivers and shoreline and five million acres of lakes remain too contaminated for recreational use. During the Bush Administration, enforcement of our environmental laws has dropped by 45 percent. Democrats support measures to provide funding to ensure that our lakes and rivers are clean enough for fishing and swimming and that the public has drinking water that is safe and clean.

Clean air. Over 13 million, or 35 percent of Hispanics, live in areas that are in violation of the federal air pollution standard for particulate matter, known commonly as soot, which causes premature death and other serious health effects. More than 19 million, or 50 percent of Hispanics, live in areas that are in violation of the federal air pollution standard for ozone, one of the major triggers for asthma attacks (League of United Latin American Citizens, *Air of Injustice: How Air Pollution Affects the Health*

of *Hispanics and Latinos*, 2004). Despite this unfortunate reality, the Bush Administration continues to undermine enforcement of the *Clean Air Act* and issue regulations that weaken existing programs.

Mercury. Mercury is a highly toxic chemical that can cause neurological and developmental problems in fetuses, infants, and children. The EPA released a recent study showing one in six pregnant women in the United States has enough mercury in their bloodstream to threaten the health of a child. Mercury contamination in fish across the United States is so pervasive that 45 states have issued fish consumption advisories. The Food and Drug Administration also has warned pregnant women about the dangers of eating tuna fish, which absorb mercury through their tissues. Recently, the Bush Administration weakened language on the health risks of mercury exposure in the proposed rule to regulate mercury emissions from power plants. Senate Democrats oppose these changes and believe a new mercury rule should be issued that does not undermine public health and air quality.

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). LIHEAP helps more than 4.5 million elderly, disabled, and low-income working families pay their home energy bills. For four years, the Bush Administration has opposed funding increases to this program. The Administration proposed \$2 billion for LIHEAP in its Fiscal Year 2005 budget proposal. Given the importance of LIHEAP to many Hispanic and African American families, Democrats have supported an increased funding level for LIHEAP of \$3.4 billion.

As the record shows, Democrats have a steadfast commitment to and long-standing history of support for legislative issues that particularly affect the needs of Hispanic Americans. We are committed to advancing a sound public policy agenda that will make America a more just, more equitable, and more accessible place for not only the Hispanic community, but for all Americans.